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Worldview, Sphere Sovereignty, and *Desiring the Kingdom*: A Guide for (Perplexed) Reformed Folk



by James K.A. Smith

Somehow I never learned how to lie prostrate before sacred cows. It's not that I lack idolatrous inclinations; it's just that I regularly underestimate the sacred nature of prevailing bovine statues in the neighborhood. It's not that I'm an eager icono-

clast; it's just that I'm enough of a newcomer to various conversations that I don't always appreciate the sacrosanct status of "our" concepts.

For example, I quickly learned that if you write a book on Christian education and offhandedly (and somewhat tongue-in-cheek) suggest even a *temporary* "moratorium" on the notion of "world-view," you can expect some animated responses and festering suspicion.¹ The villagers begin to get restless, so to speak, even if you thought you were a citizen of the village. This suspicion has characterized some of the response to *Desiring the Kingdom* in Reformed quarters of Christian higher education. This essay addresses some of those concerns by providing something of a guide to the argument of *Desiring the Kingdom* for Reformed folk who might be perplexed by some of my claims and proposals.² In the process, I hope I can reestablish that I'm one of "us" and even that the core of my argument is unapologetically Reformed.

To do so, I will very briefly rehearse the argument of *Desiring the Kingdom*. It begins from a sort of working axiom that every pedagogy assumes an anthropology: that is, every approach to education assumes some model of the human person, even if this anthropology is never made explicit. Thus, our understanding of the nature and goal of education is shaped by what we think human beings are. So if you (implicitly) think that human beings are

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essentially thinking things—containers for ideas, beliefs, and propositions—then you will end up conceiving of education as a primarily *informative* project: the dissemination of ideas and beliefs into mind-receptacles. And I argue that much of the recent rhetoric about “worldview” in Christian higher education falls into this camp: it tends to think about the nature and task of Christian education as the dissemination of certain *content*, or the provision of a Christian “perspective” on how to *think* about the world.

The argument of *Desiring the Kingdom* is *not* that this is wrong but only that it is inadequate, and this inadequacy stems from the stunted anthropology that is assumed. Or, to put this in terms I first learned from the Reformational tradition, such a picture of education is insufficiently *radical* because it doesn’t get to the *root* of our identity. By focusing on the cognitive and intellectual, such a model of the person—and its corresponding picture of education—undervalues and underestimates the importance of the affective; by focusing on what we think and believe, such a model misses the centrality and primacy of what we *love*; by focusing on education as the dissemination of *information*, we have missed the ways in which Christian education is really a project of *formation*. In other words, at the heart of *Desiring the Kingdom*’s argument is an antireductionism and the affirmation of a more holistic understanding of human persons and Christian education. And such antireductionism and holism I learned at the feet of Herman Dooyeweerd and Calvin Seerveld.

Thus, I make three intertwined proposals in the book, all indebted to Saint Augustine, that patron saint of the Reformers: first, I sketch an alternative anthropology that emphasizes the primacy of love and the priority of the imagination in shaping our identity and governing our orientation to the world;³ second, I emphasize that education is *also* about the formation (“aiming”) of our love and desire, and that such formation happens through embodied, communal rituals we might call “liturgies”—including a range of “secular” liturgies that are pedagogies of desire; third, given the formative priority of liturgical practices, I argue that the task of Christian education needs to be resituated within the ecclesial practices of Christian worship

and liturgical formation. In other words, we need to reconnect worship and worldview, church and college.

As I should have guessed, this nexus of proposals set off alarms for those within a Reformed (especially Kuyperian) orbit. Let me try to formulate these as the FAQs often directed to *Desiring the Kingdom*, and then extend the conversation by trying to answer these questions here:

1. Is this really Reformed? How could a proposal that is critical of the notion of “worldview” be Reformed? And isn’t the “worldview” that’s being rejected here really only a *caricature*?
2. Isn’t this just a new-fangled version of old, fundamentalist anti-intellectualism? Isn’t this just Jamie returning to his emotivist Pentecostal heritage? Doesn’t this model give comfort to those who would denigrate the life of the mind and the importance of critical Christian reflection? Isn’t *Desiring the Kingdom* just retreating to the status quo that generated the so-called scandal of the evangelical *mind*?
3. Aren’t we in danger of blurring important boundaries between the church and the college? In other words, doesn’t this proposal violate the sovereignty of the spheres—making the school into the church? Don’t we need some border patrol here?

These are all very fair concerns. They get to the heart of whether the sort of college envisioned in *Desiring the Kingdom* is really “Reformed.” I’m grateful for the opportunity to address these three sets of concerns as a way of trying to establish the Reformed pedigree of the “ecclesial college” sketched at the end of *Desiring the Kingdom*.

I. Whose Worldview? Which Calvinism?

Does *Desiring the Kingdom* pull the rug out from under the very project of Reformed higher education by rejecting the notion of worldview? A very simple answer is, “No.” A more complex, nuanced answer is, “Kinda maybe sorta.” Let me explain.

A. Two Cheers for Worldview

To be very clear, nowhere in *Desiring the Kingdom* do I reject the notion of worldview. Indeed, if I can offer a bit of personal testimony, the truth is that, for me, the discovery of “worldview thinking” was revolutionary. I’m a whole-hearted worldview convert, as it were. Having been converted to Christian faith through a very dualistic, anti-intellectual tradition (the Plymouth Brethren—a named target in

*My concern is that just when it seems as if everybody is adopting a “worldview” approach, what we get in the name of “worldview” is a stunted step-brother of the holistic “complex” Abraham Kuyper spoke of when discussing the Calvinist “world- and life-view.”*⁶

Kuyper’s “Common Grace” lecture!), I found the “world-affirming” ethos of the Reformed tradition to be both liberating and illuminating. The holism of this “worldview” paradigm has informed every aspect of my work; yea, it’s precisely why I answered the call to become a Christian scholar. It’s also why, now, when I face students who have been hearing about the Reformed “worldview” of “creation-fall-redemption” since kindergarten (having been blessed with a lifetime of Christian education in the Reformed tradition where these matters are taken for granted), I’m not sure whether to yell or cry when I see their jaded eyes glaze over. I do somersaults to try to get them to (re)appreciate the genius and wisdom embedded in “worldview” thinking, which, in my experience, broke open the world for me.

So I have to confess that I find it odd when

readers conclude that *Desiring the Kingdom* rejects the notion of worldview. It certainly offers a critique of where this model has gone, but it does not amount to a “rejection” of worldview—even if I do counsel a (*temporary*) “moratorium” on the term. Indeed, on the opening page of the book (on the first page of the Preface) I note that, though my project is to “push down through worldview to worship as the matrix from which a Christian worldview is born,” “[t]his doesn’t require rejecting worldview-talk, only situating it in relation to Christian practices” (11).⁴ In fact, in the next sentence I offer *Desiring the Kingdom* as a “companion volume” to classic worldview texts such as Walsh and Middleton’s *Transforming Vision*, Wolters’ *Creation Regained*, and Neal Plantinga’s *Engaging God’s World*.⁵

All that is simply to emphasize that, rather than being a “sustained attack” on worldview, *Desiring the Kingdom* offers two cheers for this paradigm. Indeed, the whole project assumes the worldview paradigm in order to refine and recalibrate it.

B. On the Inadequacies of Worldview: Or, Reading Wendell Berry in Costco

So where does this perception come from? What is it about *Desiring the Kingdom* that makes people worried that I’m abandoning the importance of worldview for Christian higher education? On the one hand, I spend some time noting that the model of “worldview” I’m rejecting is a kind of mutated version that has emerged precisely when worldview-talk went evangelical, so to speak, unhooked from the creation-affirming holism of the Reformed tradition (*DTK* 31-32). My concern is that just when it seems as if everybody is adopting a “worldview” approach, what we get in the name of “worldview” is a stunted step-brother of the holistic “complex” Abraham Kuyper spoke of when discussing the Calvinist “world-and life-view.”⁶

On the other hand, I think there remain legitimate concerns with even the best rendition of “worldview” approaches insofar as they tend to still conceive the task of Christian education as the dissemination of a *perspective*, a way to *see* the world. My criticism here is not that this is wrong but only that it is inadequate. It is an approach that imagines us (and our students) as primarily *spectators* of the world rather than as *actors* in the world.

But if one of the goals of Christian education is to form what Neal Plantinga describes as “prime citizens of the kingdom,” then we need to appreciate that we *act* as citizens, not primarily on the basis of cognitive deliberation, or even on the basis of our “perspectives,” but for the most part on the basis of acquired habits, unconscious desires, and pre-intellectual dispositions. And so our education has to be attuned to how those desires and dispositions are formed. We might have a highly developed, articulate “worldview” and yet *act* in ways that are remarkably inconsistent with such a “perspective.”

Let me try to make sense of this with an example: over the past several years, through the steady evangelism of my wife, Deanna, I have become more and more convinced about the injustice of our dominant systems of food production and consumption. Through the influence of people like Barbara Kingsolver, Michael Pollan, and especially Wendell Berry, I have become intellectually convinced that they offer the best perspective for thinking about these issues. Indeed, in many ways I’ve owned their perspective as my own.

But a funny thing happened on the way to the grocery store: I discovered a significant gap between my thought and my action. This hit home to me one day while I was immersed in reading Wendell Berry’s delightful anthology, *Bringing It to the Table*. As I paused to reflect on a key point, and thus briefly took my nose out of the book, I was suddenly struck by an ugly irony: here I was reading Wendell Berry in the food court at Costco. There are so many things wrong with that sentence I don’t even know where to begin: indeed, “the food court at Costco” might be a kind of shorthand for Berry’s picture of the sixth circle of hell.

So how might one account for this gap between my thought and my action—between my passionate intellectual assent to these ideas and my status quo action? Well, this is exactly the intuition at the heart of *Desiring the Kingdom*: While Pollan and Berry may have successfully recruited my intellect, they have not been successful in converting my habits. Nor could they be, for too much of my action and orientation to the world is governed by dispositions that are shaped by *practice*.

Implicit in the anthropology of *Desiring the Kingdom* is a philosophy of action—a tacit assump-

tion about what drives or causes human behavior and action, and such a philosophy of action is germane to the goal and task of Christian education. *Desiring the Kingdom*’s account of the formative power of both “secular liturgies” and intentional Christian worship has a certain urgency precisely because it assumes that most of our orientation to—and action in—the world is governed by pre-conscious habits and patterns of behavior, and that those habits are formed by *environments* of practice. This view stands in contrast to what Charles Taylor calls “intellectualist”⁷ or “decisionist” models, which tend to overestimate “thinking” as the cause of action. This view does *not* entail a crass determinism; nor does it exclude a role for reflective, deliberative, conscious “choice.” However, such a model—shored up by recent research in cognitive science—does relativize the role of ratiocinative deliberation in action. More positively, it highlights the significant impact of environment (and attendant practices) in shaping our “adaptive unconscious,” which then steers/drives action at a preconscious level. As such, we should be increasingly attentive to the formative role of environment and practice in shaping our desires.

The response to such a situation is *not* simply pressing people to *think more* about what they’re doing. Consider another example from eating and practices associated with food. In his book *Mindless Eating*, Cornell nutritionist Brian Wansink accounts for the American obesity epidemic in terms of the habits and practices that unconsciously shape our tastes and eating patterns.⁸ We are trained to orient ourselves to food and food systems by practices and environments that shape our orientation at a preconscious level—and then we regularly act on the basis of those malformed desires. We eat “mindlessly.” However, what’s most significant is Wansink’s antidote to this problem: it is *not* a matter of *mindful* eating. Drawing on extensive psychological research, Wansink demonstrates that we simply are not the sorts of animals who can be deliberately “on” all the time. So the proper response to unhealthy mindless eating is not *mindful* eating but rather *healthy* mindless eating, changing environments and practices in order to form different (unconscious) habits.

A “worldview approach” would assume that

the proper response to mindless eating is *mindful* eating. Similarly, an “intellectualist” model of education would assume that the proper response to the unconscious formation of “secular liturgies” would be “critical reflection,” *thinking about it* more, *thinking about* what we’re doing. Of course, such reflection and thinking is important and crucial; and the articulation of a Christian worldview is helpful—but as I’ve already pointed out, you can read Wendell Berry in Costco. The argument of *Desiring the Kingdom* is not that we need *less* than worldview, but *more*: that Christian education will only be fully an education to the extent that it is also a formation of our habits. And such formation happens not only, or even primarily, by equipping the intellect but through the repetitive formation of embodied, communal practices. And as I suggest in *Desiring the Kingdom*, the “core” practices in this respect are specifically the practices of Christian worship. But before turning to a consideration of the role of worship in Christian education, let me address a second concern: that *Desiring the Kingdom* encourages a retreat back into anti-intellectual pietism.

II. A Hearts *and* Minds Strategy: On Anti-intellectualism

Granted, in *Desiring the Kingdom* I basically argue that discussions of Christian higher education overestimate the importance of thinking. This is generally not a good strategy for trying to win friends and influence people when the people involved consider themselves thinkers. Furthermore, many of those toiling in the not-so-ivory halls of Christian colleges and universities would be quite surprised to hear that *thinking* is being overvalued in North American Christianity. Indeed, quite the opposite seems to be true: evangelical piety tends to intensify a general anti-intellectual malaise that besets our culture. The response to such a situation would be to encourage *more* thinking, not less—to emphasize the importance of the *mind*, not fall back into the soppy mushiness of “the heart” and its affections. In short, with its critique of “rationalist” or “intellectualist” models of the human person, it would seem that *Desiring the Kingdom* plays right into the hands of anti-intellectualism.⁹

Indeed, some seem to worry that, on my model, we’d just spend all day in chapel or that the

Christian college would just be a glorified Sunday school. But such worries stem from a misunderstanding of my emphasis on worship with respect to worldview;¹⁰ in particular, such a worry seems to read my claim—that worship is a necessary and important condition for integral Christian education—as if I were saying this was a *sufficient* condition for Christian education. But I’m not suggesting we raze the physics labs and expand the chapel. I’m not suggesting we demolish the literature classroom and all just stay in church all week. Nor do I anywhere suggest that a Christian university is not about the business of *ideas*! Of course it is; the issue is whether it is *just* trafficking in ideas. It’s the latter that I’m rejecting.

The argument of Desiring the Kingdom is not that we need less than worldview, but more: that Christian education will only be fully an education to the extent that it is also a formation of our habits.

However, let me honor this worry about anti-intellectualism by pointing out two things in response: First, I will concede that, on the basis of a hasty and selective reading, the argument of *Desiring the Kingdom* could “fall into the wrong hands,” so to speak. That is, a superficial reading of the project might misunderstand it as giving comfort to just the sort of anti-intellectualism that Reformed evangelical scholars have been working to undo. While I don’t think a close reading of the argument bears this out, I think I understand how this happened: quite simply, I inhabit a stream of the Christian tradition where devotion to the life of the mind has deep roots. And such a commitment to the “life of the mind” was so assumed in my argument that I could criticize a certain “rationalist” overemphasis without ever worrying

that this would give license to abandoning critical thinking.¹¹

Second, let me just emphasize that my goal is not to denigrate the intellect but to *situate* theoretical reflection within the wider purview of our fundamental pre-theoretical orientation to the world.¹² From this goal, some too hastily conclude that *relativizing* the intellectual is somehow a rejection of the intellectual, but that clearly doesn't follow. *Desiring the Kingdom* is pressing us to consider the significance of our non- and pre-intellectual orientation of the world, to appreciate all of the ways in which this shapes and governs our being in the world, and to therefore expand what we consider as falling within the purview of education. To situate (and relativize) the intellect is not anti-intellectual; it is emphasizing that even rationality needs to be *faithful*, needs to be disciplined and trained. And this seems to be a deeply biblical sensibility. Indeed, Paul's prayer for the Christians in Philippi could easily be the epigraph of *Desiring the Kingdom*:

And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may determine *what really matters*... (Phi. 1.9-10, *NASB*, revised)

Our knowledge and discernment is guided and shaped by our loves. And love takes practice.

The fact that our loves guide and shape our knowledge and discernment is my reason for emphasizing the implications: education operates on this pre-theoretical register whether we recognize it or not. Pedagogies of desire form our habits, affections, and imaginations, thus shaping and priming our very orientation to the world. So if a Christian education is going to be holistic and formative, it needs to attend to much more than the intellect; for this reason, I emphasize that a unique "understanding" is "carried" in Christian practices, particularly the practices of Christian worship. It is in such practices that our love is "trained," disciplined, shaped, and formed. And it is, to some extent, *only* in such practices that this training, disciplining, shaping, and forming can happen. Attention to intellect is insufficient precisely because there is an irreducible, unique "understanding" that is only carried in practices.

Let me try to make sense of this point with

an analogy between literature and liturgy, drawing on the work of Merleau-Ponty.¹³ Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology provides the framework to more carefully articulate the core claim of *Desiring the Kingdom*: that love is its own kind of knowing, operative on a "pre-theoretical" register. For Merleau-Ponty, this knowing requires taking our *embodiment* more seriously, charting a space between "intellect" and instinct, between reflection and reflex. As he poetically puts it, "my body is the pivot of the world."¹⁴ What he's describing—and what I was trying to describe in *Desiring the Kingdom*—is a kind of "preconscious knowledge" which is "not of the kind: 'I think that....'"¹⁵

Merleau-Ponty describes this kind of knowledge as "motor intentionality,"¹⁶ a kind of bodily knowledge that cannot be articulated in propositional form. Our actions and movement, then, are not "handmaidens of consciousness" as if the outcome of deliberative representation; to the contrary, "[c]onsciousness is being-towards-the-thing through the intermediary of the body. A movement is learned when the body has understood it, that is, when it has incorporated it into its 'world,' and to move one's body is to aim at things through it; it is to allow oneself to respond to their call."¹⁷ He names this "praktognosia"—an irreducible know-*how* that gets into our bones: "Our bodily experience of movement is not a particular case of knowledge; it provides us with a way of access to the world and the object, with a 'praktognosia,' which has to be recognized as original and perhaps as primary."¹⁸ Thus Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of embodiment and "motor intentionality" provides resources to understand the mechanics of liturgical formation, which is also bodily—another kind of "training" or "praktognosia."

Furthermore, his phenomenological framework can also help us understand the function of narrative, story, and literature.¹⁹ For example, in considering the case study of "Schneider"—whose brain injury has eliminated his praktognosia and requires him to *think through* everything—Merleau-Ponty notes that because of this condition, Schneider is unable to understand *stories*. "[I]ndeed if a story is told to the patient, it is observed that instead of grasping it as a melodic whole with down and up beats, with its characteristic rhythm or flow,

he remembers it only as a succession of facts to be noted one by one.”²⁰ This is because there is a kind of knowledge “carried” in stories which cannot be processed didactically, cannot be paraphrased.²¹

III. Church, College, and Sphere Sovereignty:

Re-reading Kuyper

Desiring the Kingdom, then, argues that a holistic, formative Christian education not only will equip students with a Christian perspective but also must form students through Christian practice—for only practiced formation will adequately capture our imaginations and convert our habits such that our orientation and action in the world is aimed at the *shalom* God desires for his creation.²² This wider goal means that Christian colleges and universities must be not only informed by a Christian worldview but also nourished by Christian *worship*, for it is the historic, intentional, communal practices of Christian worship that “carry” a formative, liturgical “understanding” of God’s redemptive good news.²³ And this “know-how”—this praxiognosia—cannot be paraphrased; it cannot be adequately translated into the portability of propositions. It can only be absorbed through practice.

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On this account, Christian worship (and other related Christian practices²⁴) is not just beneficial to the task of Christian education but essential. Through the practices of Christian worship, we acquire a tacit know-how that shapes our action, including our theoretical activity. These practices are meant to form us as a people who desire the kingdom and who embody a foretaste of that coming kingdom. But before we ever articulate a Christian worldview, we absorb a visceral understanding of

God’s kingdom in the practice of Christian worship. If we believe in order to understand, you might say we worship in order to worldview.

It is this part of my argument that raises the final cluster of concerns for Reformed folk: doesn’t this sound as if I’m collapsing the church as “organism” into the church as “institute?” Doesn’t this blur the boundaries between church and school, between these sovereign spheres? This all starts to sound a bit, well, “Catholic.”

Let me address this concern from a couple of angles.

First, I’ll confess that I am quite intentionally countering a certain kind of Kuyperianism; but that might not be the same as countering Kuyper. Kuyper has been inherited in different ways in North America, yielding different Kuyperianisms. While Zwaanstra suggests that “ecclesiology was the core of [Kuyper’s] theology,”²⁵ one quickly notes that it is the church as *organism* that is the “heart” of his doctrine. This emphasis, coupled with some other emphases in Kuyper, led to a strain of Kuyperianism that actually had little place for the church as *institute* in its understanding of Christian engagement with culture. Indeed, there have even been strains of Kuyperianism that have been quite *anti*-ecclesial. On the other hand, Kuyper himself clearly saw a crucial role for the church as institute and devoted a great deal of his time, energy, and gifts to its welfare and reform.²⁶ The fact that he did, signals that there might be a different way to inherit Kuyper on this score. This idea invites us to re-read Kuyper with new eyes, and I’d like to briefly offer such a re-reading here.

Let’s take, as an example, his classic statement of sphere sovereignty and the institute/organism distinction in “Common Grace.”²⁷ In order to get to the heart of the matter, permit me a brief detour into his argument. We should first appreciate that he’s doing battle on two fronts: on the one hand, he is opposing the model of a “national church” (which was then still a sort of live option in the Netherlands); on the other hand, he is battling “secitarianism,” which is the ecclesiological outworking of the pietism he has already criticized. Let’s pick this up in his critique of the national church.

Note, first, where Kuyper says that he *agrees* with the national church “party”: “[W]e and they

agree that Christ's church and its means of grace cover a broader field than that of special grace alone" (189). In other words, they both agree that the church—as the body of Christ—is called to have an impact beyond merely “spiritual” matters. The body of Christ is to be the agent by which the “significance” of Christ for “nature” is made manifest. “We both acknowledge that the church does two things: (1) it works *directly* for the well-being of the elect, lures them to conversion, comforts, edifies, unites, and sanctifies them; but (2) it works *indirectly* for the well-being of the whole of civil society, constraining it to civic virtue” (189-190). So the church is called to have a “leavening” effect on society, impacting all the spheres of human cultural production.

With that agreement in mind, we can appreciate the difference; *viz.*, they differ “in how to reach that good goal.” The disagreement, in other words, is about strategy. The national church party thinks that the way to have this impact is to “include civil society in the church” (190). Kuyper, in contrast, emphasizes that the church *as institute* should be a “city on a hill amid civil society” (190) *from which* the church as organism infiltrates and leavens civil society. As he'll later put it, “[t]his institute does not cover everything that is Christian. Though the lamp of the Christian religion only burns within that institute's walls, its light shines out through its windows to areas far beyond, illumining all the sectors and associations that appear across the wide range of human life and activity” (194). Thus, he suggests that we picture these as concentric circles, with the church as institute—administering the sacraments, exercising discipline, forming disciples—nourishing a vibrant core of believers who, as an organism, infiltrate and leaven civil society (194-195).²⁸

With this model in mind, we can see Kuyper's critique of both the national church and sectarianism. Because the national church model “recognizes only one circle,”²⁹ so to speak (194)—because it can only imagine the church as institute and thus absorbs civil society into the institute—it thereby dilutes the vibrant core that is needed to be leavening. In other words, by baptizing everyone, the national church admits into the church a host of non-confessors and unbelievers, and by failing to

exercise church discipline, it loses any purifying or sanctifying animus with which to impact society. By effectively taking “the world” (i.e., civil society, 194) into the church, the church just becomes worldly (196). It lacks any Christ-disciplined center from which to be a means of making Christ “significant” for the rest of society.³⁰

However, if the national church goes wrong by losing its center so to speak, *sectarianism* goes wrong by retreating into and fortifying itself within a pure “center” and thereby neglecting responsibility for “nature.” “Sects,” for Kuyper, are those configurations (or rather, *disfigurations*) of Christianity that effectively put themselves “outside the context of *human life*” (191). A sect is “a tiny holy circle that has remained on earth by mistake and really has nothing to do with the life that is lived down here” (191). Sectarrians are also critics of the national church, but they criticize not only the *strategy* but also the *goal*; on their account, the Gospel is not concerned with the institutions and practices of civil society. Politics, economics, the arts, and education are “worldly” matters not of their concern. In short, sectarianism rejects what God affirms as good, *viz.*, creation in all its facets; thus, it also rejects any notion of common grace.³¹ Or, in the language Kuyper has used earlier, sectarians reject “nature.”

Now, what does this distinction between the church as institute and organism have to do with our concern—specifically, the relationship between the church and college, worship and worldview? Well, what's at stake here is not only how we make the distinction between the two, but how we understand the *relation* between the two. So while Kuyper certainly emphasizes that “the institute does not cover everything that is Christian” (194), he goes on to note, recalling the concentric circle metaphor, that “Aside from this first circle of the institute *and in necessary connection with it*, we thus recognize another circle whose circumference is determined by the length of the ray that shines out from the church institute over the life of people and nation” (195, *emphases added*). It seems to me that it is precisely Kuyper's claim that there is a *necessary connection* between institute and organism that has been lost in certain strains of Kuyperianism. And why does Kuyper propose a necessary connection between the two? He does so precisely be-

cause it is the worship of the church as institute which *forms* those who will be the rays of light in civil society.

The model I propose in *Desiring the Kingdom* does not collapse the distinction between institute and organism, but it does aim to (re)connect them in just the “necessary” way Kuyper emphasized.

Conclusion: Remember We Are Catholic

That said, the question isn’t whether my argument is Kuyperian. My goal has been to demonstrate that it is Reformed. However, in demonstrating that it is Reformed, I don’t mean to argue that it is *not* “Catholic.” That is a charge I will happily, even eagerly, accept, for I think Reformed folk could do nothing better than remember we are Catholic.³² The Protestant Reformation is an Augustinian renewal movement in the church catholic, not a philosophical project spawned in the early twentieth century. The unique educational vision of the Reformed tradition will only be enhanced and deepened through a more intentional appropriation of the accrued wisdom of our Catholic heritage—a wisdom that is “carried,” first and foremost, in the shape of Christian worship. If we hope to “worldview” well, we must learn to worship well.

Endnotes

1. See James K.A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 65.
2. This paper originated as a plenary presentation at the 2010 Symposium of the Association of Reformed Institutions of Higher Education at Redeemer University College. I’m grateful to Syd Hielema of Redeemer for the invitation to give this address and to the participants in the conference for their feedback.
3. In volume 2 of the Cultural Liturgies trilogy (tentatively titled *How Worship Works: Imagining Liturgy as Literature*) I will discuss this in terms of a “philosophy of action.”
4. I make the same point a few pages into the Introduction when I note that “I don’t want to entirely abandon” worldview-talk (24).
5. I also explicitly affirm the helpfulness of “worldview” in my new book, *Letters to a Young Calvinist: An Invitation to the Reformed Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2010).
6. For my positive articulation of this project, see *ibid.*, 106-124.
7. On such accounts, our action is thought to be the outcome of conscious, mental deliberation—the outcome of *thinking about it*.
8. Brian Wansink, *Mindless Eating: Why We Eat More Than We Think* (New York: Bantam, 2007).
9. In this context, it’s odd to be charged with some kind of anti-intellectualism, not only because I explicitly reject this on the first page of the book (17, n.2), but also because the book itself is not exactly a walk in the park. The entire argument of the book is a pretty rigorous engagement with a whole host of ideas, inviting the reader to think through complex theories from the likes of Heidegger, Augustine, Taylor, and Bourdieu, all in order to articulate a unique, integral Christian “perspective” on education. If this reading of *Desiring the Kingdom* were correct, you’d wonder why I’d ever spend time on such a venture. Perhaps that’s a clue that this is not the best way to read the book.
10. I grant that I’m making strong claims about primacy that might almost give the impression of a dichotomous relationship between worship and worldview; but I don’t think I ever actually make the relation dichotomous, precisely for reasons I’ve already cited.
11. As I note in the preface, I imagined *Desiring the Kingdom* as a companion volume to books like Cornelius Plantinga’s *Engaging God’s World*, which clearly articulates the importance for Christian academic reflection on God’s world.
12. In this respect, my argument is very much indebted to Charles Taylor and Alasdair MacIntyre’s *Dependent, Rational Animals*.
13. Working out some of what follows will be a central focus of *How Worship Works*, the sequel to *Desiring the Kingdom*.
14. “The body is a vehicle of being in the world, and having a body is, for a living creature, to be involved in a definite environment, to identify oneself with certain projects and be continually committed to them.” Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 2002), 94.
15. *Ibid.*, 93, 94. Merleau-Ponty invokes a moving example: “We do not understand the absence or death of a friend until the time comes when we expect a reply from him and when we realize that we shall never again receive one” (93). This sort of “understanding” is often most powerfully expressed in literature or art (consider, in this case, Patty Griffin’s song, “Goodbye”).
16. *Ibid.*, 158-159.
17. *Ibid.*, 159-161.
18. *Ibid.*, 162. It’s important to note that Merleau-Ponty

significantly influenced Charles Taylor, who played a central role in the argument of *Desiring the Kingdom*.

19. Indeed, this is a central analogy for Merleau-Ponty when he addressed the irreducibility of *praktognosia*, resisting the twin reductionisms of intellectualism and empiricism, citing Scheler: “Just as all literary works...are only particular cases of the possible permutations of the sounds which make up language and of their literal signs, so qualities or sensations represent the elements from which the great poetry of our world (*Umwelt*) is made up. But just as surely as someone knowing only sounds and letters would have no understanding of literature, and would miss not only its ultimate nature but everything about it, so the world is not given and things are not accessible to those for whom ‘sensations’ are the given” (Ibid., 374).
20. Ibid., 153.
21. This raises crucial questions about *form* that will be addressed in detail by drawing an analogy between the irreducibility of form in poetry and liturgy (addressed under the rubric of “the heresy of paraphrase”; see *Phenomenology of Perception*, 174-175).
22. I should perhaps explicitly clarify that I don’t think *only* educational institutions will do this. In a way, I am suggesting that *all* Christian institutions will only be holistically Christian to the extent that they are both informed by a Christian worldview and formed by Christian practices.
23. See *Desiring the Kingdom*, chapter 5.
24. See, for example, Dorothy Bass & Craig Dykstra, eds., *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010). For discussion of how Christian practices relate to Christian Teaching, see David I. Smith & James K.A. Smith, “Introduction” to *Teaching and Christian Practices: Reshaping Faith and Learning* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011).
25. Henry Zwaansstra, “Abraham Kuyper’s Conception of the Church,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 9 (1974): 149-181 at p.150.
26. Abraham Kuyper, *Our Worship*, ed. Harry Boonstra (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009).
27. Abraham Kuyper, “Church and Culture,” from *Common Grace in Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. J. Bratt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 187-201.
28. Kuyper, in a mode of Protestant flourish, actually claims that the church as organism *precedes* the church as institute—and could even “manifest itself” where the church as institute has ceased to function (195).
29. This seems to be why Kuyperians construe “Catholic” models (of, say, Cavanaugh or MacIntyre) as variations on this “national church” model. But the national church model seems uniquely Protestant (not to say that obviously there are older Catholic correlates of this). This needs discussion and refinement. See Bolt on MacIntyre.
30. Kuyper also generates a theological account for a principled pluralism in this context: “what we want is a strong confessional church but *not* a confessional civil society *nor* a confessional state” (197). Thus, he advocates a certain kind of “secularization of state and society”—one that makes space for confessional pluralism in the state and civil society—as “one of the most basic ideas of Calvinism” (197). (This should be distinguished from an aggressive *secularism* that would seek to “nullify the church’s influence on civil society” [196].)
31. Kuyper’s argument is a tad circular here: he chastises the sectarians for refusing to recognize common grace and therefore refusing to affirm the goodness of civil society (192). We also need to (later) distinguish pietistic sectarianism from antithetical critique.
32. In some ways, Kuyper was more Protestant than the Reformers! Consider his critique of Calvin as being “too Catholic” (153). One could say that Kuyper over-emphasizes the role of worship as “expression” and misses the aspect of “formation.” As a result, he tends to see the church as a voluntary gathering of individual believers rather than an institutional site of the sacraments and means of grace (153-154). In short, one finds quite a modern individualism in Kuyper.